

SUPERBUDGET PCs

Details	Last month's position	First reviewed	PC World-Bench	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Processor type/speed	RAM	Hard disk/capacity	Mother-board	Chipset	Modem	USB ports	Monitor	Screen size	Dot pitch	Max resolution @75Hz	Graphics card	Graphics chip	Graphics card memory	Sound card	Speakers	No of speakers/subwoofer	DVD-ROM speed	CD-RW read/write/rewrite rate	Operating system, software & other extras
1 Ideal Computing Aptus L20-XP+ 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk	NEW	May 02	116 (WB 4)	£699	1-year onsite parts and labour, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/40GB	Chaintech 7VJDA	Via KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Gainward GeForce2 Ti 450	nVidia GeForce2 Ti 450	64MB	Cmedia onboard	Nisis S5 4.1	4/Y	16x	40x/16x/12x	Windows XP Home, Star Office
2 CCL Computers Home XP202 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	NEW	May 02	118 (WB 4)	£699	1-year collect and return, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	Soltek SL75-DRV4	Via KT266	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	WinFast GeForce2 Ti 200	nVidia GeForce2 Ti 200	64MB	onboard	Genius 200W	2/N	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 2001
3 Best Price Poweroid 2006 020 8904 3347 www.poweroid.com	2	Feb 02	114 (WB 4)	£699	1-year RTB parts and labour, 4-year RTB labour	AMD Athlon/1.4GHz	256MB SDRAM	Maxtor/40GB	Asus	Via Apollo KT133	56K	4	Iiyama VM 1402	17in	0.27mm	1,024x768	ATI All in Wonder Radeon	ATI Radeon	32MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/8x/4x	Windows XP Home
4 Evesham Axis 1600+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com	4	Feb 02	112 (WB 4)	£699	2-year onsite, 1-year RTB parts and labour	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Samsung/40GB	MSI	nVidia nForce	56K	2	LG EzyFlat flat-panel	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	onboard nVidia	integrated nVidia GeForce2	32MB	onboard nVidia	Cambridge four-point	4/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home
5 Campus Eclipse 330 GTX 0870 066 0711 www.campus-direct.co.uk	5	Feb 02	112 (WB 4)	£699	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/40GB	Gigabyte	Via KT266A	56K	3	Relisys TF785	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Abit Siluro T400	nVidia GeForce2 MX 400	64MB	onboard Creative	Voyager 480W	2/Y	16x	40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
6 NetHighStreet.com 0121 693 0052 www.nethighstreet.com	6	Feb 02	115 (WB 4)	£699	1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Quantum/30GB	Asus	Via KT266A	56K	4	Relisys TF785	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Videologic VividXS	STMicro Electronics Kyro II	32MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Cambridge FPS1600	4/Y	16x	32x/12x/8x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite
7 Multivision Vision Elite XP LT 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	7	Jan 02	188 (WB 2000)	£699	1-year RTB parts and labour, 4-year RTB labour	AMD Athlon XP 1600+/1.4GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Seagate/40GB	MSI	Via KT266	56K	4	Hansol 705D	17in	0.25mm	1,024x768	Hercules 3D Prophet 4500	nVidia GeForce2	64MB	Creative Labs Live 5.1	Creative DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/16x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus Millennium
8 Systemax A1300RV 1170 0870 729 7364 www.simply.co.uk	8	Nov 01	187 (WB 2000)	£699	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Biostar	Via KT133A	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	Gainward GeForce2 MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Creative SB52	2/N	16x	32x/12x/8x	Windows Me, Lotus SmartSuite, Easy CD creator
9 CCL Computers Home XLR 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk	9	Nov 01	182 (WB 2000)	£699	1-year collect and return, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.2GHz	256MB SDRAM	IBM/40GB	Soltek SL75KAV	Via KT133A	56K	2	CTX EX710F	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Hercules Prophet 4500	Kyro II	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Genius Fantasia SP-G16	2/N	16x	32x/8x/8x	Windows 98 SE, Microsoft Works, Nero, Cyberlink DVD, Genius Net Scroll
10 Easy PC 1300B 0800 195 4353 www.easypcdirect.co.uk	10	Nov 01	179 (WB)	£699	3-year return to base	AMD Athlon/1.3GHz	256MB SDRAM	Seagate/40GB	Jetway 663A Pro	Via KT133	56K	2	Relisys TF785 FST	17in	0.25mm	1,280x1,024	Inno 3D MX 400	nVidia GeForce2 MX	64MB	onboard AC97 Codec	Mercury SW-880	2/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows Me, TV card, Lotus SmartSuite Me, Windows 2000 DVD, Nero, remote control



1 **Ideal Computing Aptus L20-XP+**

With the Aptus L20-XP+, Ideal Computing has proved its dedication to making high specification systems at an affordable price. Add to that one of the best warranties in the chart, and you can see why the Aptus is our brand-new Best Buy. It's the first time we've seen AMD's 1700+ Athlon XP processor gracing the Superbudget chart, and the 1.47GHz chip is well complemented by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. This helped the Aptus turn in a WorldBench 4 score of 116. The 40GB hard drive is standard,

← Our new Best Buy is the Aptus L20-XP – the first Superbudget PC to house a 1700+ Athlon XP chip

but offers sufficient capacity. Though the 17in CTX EX710F monitor doesn't use aperture grille technology, it's one of the best shadow mask displays on the market. The addition of the Gainward 64MB GeForce2 Ti 450 card ensures top quality graphics. This TV-out board produced consistently high frame rates over all resolutions in our graphics tests, so images remain smooth.

Initially, we were disappointed that this system had onboard audio and didn't have the excellent DTT2200 speakers that came with Ideal's other chart entry. However, the Nisis S5 4.1, with four speakers plus a subwoofer, is still impressive for a Superbudget PC and, on closer inspection, the integrated audio is almost as good as a SoundBlaster Live card. This is due to its chip – the Cmedia 8738 – which is better than the typical AC97 codec on motherboards. It provides EAX support and offers just as many 3D channels as the Live card. We also praise Ideal for

putting in a CD-RW drive – something that was sorely missed on the Aptus 1600XP. Our only real niggle was the lack of documentation.

2 **CCL Computers Home XP202**

CCL's new entry replaces the Home XLS. With strong competition from Ideal Computing, the Home XP202 couldn't put CCL in the Best Buy position, but it does come away with a Recommended



↑ Our second new entry this month is CCL Computers' Home XP202, which nabs a Recommended award

award. The base specifications are excellent and helped the Home XP202 achieve the fastest performance score in the chart.

A 1700+ Athlon XP processor combined with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 40GB Maxtor hard drive helped this CCL system get a WorldBench 4 score of 118 points. The previous monitor has been replaced by the infinitely superior CTX EX710F, which offers a pin-sharp resolution of 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz. With a WinFast 64MB GeForce 2Ti 200 graphics card matching the monitor for quality and providing high frame rates, this setup offers some of the best budget graphics around.

It's unfortunate that we can't say the same for the sound hardware. There are only two Genius speakers with no subwoofer to add the all-important bass, and the onboard audio is bottom of the range. That said, the Home XP202 is redeemed by a good warranty and the fastest CD-RW drive in the chart.

→ From start to end, the Best Price Poweroid 2006 is a strong, top-quality Superbudget system

3 **Best Price Poweroid 2006**

The Poweroid 2006 slips down a place this month due to two new entries above it in our chart. Performance may be important but, as the Best Price Poweroid demonstrates, the entire specification is just as vital. The Poweroid offers enough speed – its modest 1.4GHz Athlon, twinned with 256MB of SDRAM, produced a highly respectable WorldBench 4 score of 114 – but it's the supporting cast that makes this machine an excellent all-rounder.

The Iiyama monitor may have a 0.27mm dot pitch and low resolution support, but the colourful picture is more than palatable.



The ATI All in Wonder Radeon graphics card is also more than a match for the GeForce2 MX cards featured elsewhere in the chart. The Best Price has some superb video and TV options. Even the sound system – a Creative Live 5.1 and DTT2200 speakers – is impressive, while the 40GB hard drive gets a boost from the Promise 100 interface.

Although the Best Buy Aptus and second-placed Home XP202 ranks as the better deal, the Recommended Poweroid 2006 still offers plenty of superb features. Thanks to its advanced sound and video capabilities, the Best Price is a credible third choice.

4 **Evesham Axis 1600+**

The Evesham Axis manages to hold on to a Recommended award this month, despite the two new systems in our chart. Having secured a tight hold over the graphics card market, nVidia has now turned its attention to motherboards. Evesham's new Axis 1600+ Athlon XP PC sports an MSI nForce motherboard, whose unique architecture is hyped as being able to

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↑ The Evesham Axis features ample expansion opportunities and easy-to-follow documentation

deliver high-quality integrated graphics and sound.

The evidence this time round suggests that, good though the nForce is, you'll still get more bang for your buck from non-integrated components. The graphics controller, for instance, offers ageing GeForce2 performance. And, although its video encoding is fairly good, you're not going to get the highest frame rates from your games collection.

The Evesham's sound, on the other hand, is clean. However, even with the high-calibre four-point speakers, it lacks the versatility and resonance of a PC equipped with the Creative Live 5.1. Performance is slightly disappointing, and the Evesham's WorldBench 4 score of 112 is surprisingly low for a 1600+ processor.

There's no such thing as an all-bad Evesham PC, and the Axis 1600+ comes with some quality accessories, plenty of

opportunity for expansion and strong documentation. However, it's likely that, unburdened by the nForce architecture, the Axis would be placed higher up the chart.

5 Campus Eclipse 330 GTX

The Campus Eclipse scores high marks for presentation, but lacks the speed needed to put its rivals out of the picture. However, it's nice to see a clear, detailed manual – a frequent omission in this chart. The case is good, with plenty of expansion space, and there's also three USB and two FireWire ports. It's just a shame that the elaborate case design makes it so difficult for the uninitiated to get under the lid.

Otherwise, the Eclipse offers an assortment of decent peripherals, including a 40GB hard drive. System performance is perhaps the biggest flaw – the 1600+ Athlon XP and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM only scored 112 in our WorldBench 4 tests.



↑ The Campus Eclipse 330 GTX has plenty of high-quality peripherals but it's not a speed demon



↑ Impressive audio on the NetHighStreet.com is let down by a less-than-adequate graphics setup

6 NetHighStreet.com

The NetHighStreet was unlucky enough to be part of a particularly strong batch of machines, but keeps its ranking at number six despite two new entries. The 30GB hard drive is slightly undersized and the Videologic VividXS graphics card, although far from poor, falls behind the competition in the ever-changing video card market.

We did expect more of the 1600+ Athlon XP processor and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, but a WorldBench 4 score of 115 is still respectable. The audio system is good, but we weren't convinced by the monitor. Internally the system is fine, but more instructions would have helped, and the one-year return-to-base warranty isn't reassuring. Although the NetHighStreet isn't good enough for the top five, it wasn't far off and remains a capable workhorse.

Backup drives

Most of us don't back up our PC files as often as we should to protect against data loss. Yet there are now more ways to do this than ever before. This has partly been driven by the increasing interest in video and photo editing, which requires people to store and transfer large multimedia files. The current craze is for the various recordable DVD drives, which are explained in more detail on page 114.

However, DVD recorders are still very expensive, which has allowed CD-RW to continue unchallenged as the backup format of choice for most users. Burning CDs used to be an arduous affair, but today's writers are fast, reliable and, more importantly, cheap. Formats such as Zip and Jaz, which took up where

floppies left off, are still popular and offer storage of up to 250MB and 2GB respectively.

External hard drives are a good option for those who want masses of storage space, offering capacities of up to 120GB. Another storage format gradually gaining popularity is the small USB drive of the type such as Sony's MicroVault. These plug directly into the USB port of a computer and are built on flash memory technology. But the latest advance making waves in consumer backup technology is not a new format but a new connection. USB 2.0 is 40 times faster than its predecessor USB 1.1 and is fast making its appearance on everything from CD-RWs to Zip devices and hard drives.

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↑ Showing some staying power is the ex-Best Buy Vision Elite XP LT, which holds at number seven

7 Multivision Vision Elite XP LT

The first Superbudget PC to offer AMD's new 1600+ Athlon XP processor and 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, the Multivision couldn't fail to take its place at the head of January's chart. That it slipped to seventh place in February, displaced by several new entries with the same central system, is a sign that the Vision Elite didn't explore its full potential.

That's not to say that the Multivision Vision Elite XP doesn't have its strengths. Its drive facilities are plentiful, and the 40GB Seagate hard drive and CD writer, offering 16-speed CD-R and 12-speed CD-RW, are impressive. The four added USB ports and Multivision's clear sound system, which pairs Creative's Live 5.1 card with five vibrant DDT2200 speakers, are also top notch. There are some drawbacks on the Multivision Vision Elite XP LT, though, and the 17in Hansol monitor isn't the best we've seen. Also, as with a number of Superbudget PCs, documentation is lacking, although internal access for upgrading is easy.



↑ The Systemax A1300RV offers a decent feature set, including an LG monitor, but its sound system is poor

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8 Systemax A1300RV 1170

The 1.3GHz Athlon-powered Systemax struggles in vain to fight off the challenge of the 1.4GHz 1600+ Athlon XP PCs, even with the quality of its sub-components – that is, the LG monitor, 64MB Gainward graphics card and 40GB hard drive. Indeed, the weak sound system is the one flaw in the Systemax's decent list of accessories. Although no longer the fastest PC on offer, the Systemax is surprisingly strong for an eighth place contender.



card may be losing its lustre, the 17in CTX EX710F monitor remains an inspiring addition to any Superbudget PC. Elsewhere, the PC is reliable rather than exciting, and a price cut would vastly increase its appeal.

10 Easy PC 1300B

There's no room for second best in the cutthroat Superbudget PCs market, and the Easy PC's 1.3GHz processor fails to keep up with AMD's new 1600+ Athlon chip. In fact, its poor WorldBench 2000 performance is the main reason why the Easy PC is stuck at tenth position for another month.

There are other flaws, most notably the dreadful case – with six screws to undo, you must lift off the whole housing to gain access to the PC's innards. The Easy PC remains a solid purchase but, as our charts show, there are now nine other PCs that represent better value.

↓ The Easy PC 1300B's badly designed case makes it a pain to upgrade, as it's hard to access the innards



↑ CCL Computers' Home XLR is being left behind by the rest of the competition due to its 1.2GHz Athlon

9 CCL Computers Home XLR

As the second of two CCL PCs in the Superbudget chart, it's merely the passage of time that leaves the Home XLR looking frayed around the edges. In the light of the AMD Athlon processor managing just 1.2GHz, its WorldBench 2000 score of 182 isn't as meagre as you might expect. The spacious case is also a bonus and, though the Kyro II graphics

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